

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 10782

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, SHUM, NI
SUBJECT: SUPPORT IN THE SMC FOR AWOLOWO?

1. EMBASSY LABOR/POLITICAL ASSISTANT WHO HAS RECENTLY BEEN REPORTING ON YORUBA POLITICS SPOKE WITH A TOP AWOLOWO SUPPORTER WHO SAID THAT SOME SMC MEMBERS INCLUDING OBASANJO ARE NOW SUPPORTING THE CHIEF. HIS REPORT FOLLOWS WITH OUR COMMENT.

2. EMBASSY LABOR/POLITICAL ASSISTANT MET CHIEF BISI ONABANJO, A MEMBER OF THE CA, A POLITICAL SON TO CHIEF AWOLOWO, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE IJEBU ODE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL, AT ISLAND CLUB, LAGOS, AUGUST 26. CHIEF ONABANJO STATED THAT HE HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY BY CHIEF AWOLOWO FOR ORGANIZING A WORLD PRESS CONFERENCE ON SEPTEMBER 29, 1978 TO PERMIT CHIEF AWOLOWO TO PRESENT HIS POLITICAL PROGRAMS TO NIGERIA IN PARTICULAR AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD IN GENERAL. ACCORDING TO CHIEF ONABANJO, THE PRESS CONFERENCE WILL TAKE PLACE AT CHIEF AWOLOWO'S RESIDENCE AND BE FOLLOWED BY A SMALL PARTY FOR FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. HE DISCLOSED HE HAD JUST MET WITH MRS. HILDA AWOLOWO IN HER LAGOS RESIDENCE ON THIS AND OTHER ISSUES PENDING THE ARRIVAL OF CHIEF AWOLOWO FROM A POLITICAL TOUR OF ANAMBRA STATE.

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3. ON AWOLOWO'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS, ONABANJO SAID BRIGADIER OLULEYE, FEDERAL COMMISSIONER FOR FINANCE, PRESENTED A PAPER ON THE COUNTRY'S FINANCES TO THE SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL ON AUGUST 11 IN WHICH HE APPLAUDED CHIEF AWOLOWO FOR KEEPING NIGERIA'S FINANCES INTACT DURING AND AFTER THE CIVIL WAR. ACCORDING TO ONABANJO, SOME MEMBERS OF THE SMC SUPPORT CHIEF AWOLOWO AS

THE ONLY PRESIDENT CAPABLE OF MAINTAINING THE COUNTRY'S FINANCES AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE MILITARY LEADERS. IN PARTICULAR, ONABANJO SAID THAT HEAD OF STATE, OBASANJO, POLICE INSPECTOR YUSUFU AND FUTURE FIRST DIVISION GOC AKINRINADE AS WELL AS OLULEYE SUPPORT AWOLOWO.

4. ONABANJO SAID FURTHER THAT BECAUSE OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR CHIEF AWOLOWO, MEMBERS OF THE SMC HAVEN'T BEEN INTERFERING WITH CHIEF AWOLOWO'S ILLEGAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN MEETINGS. HE RECALLED AN OCCASION WHEN CHIEF AWOTESU, AWOLOWO'S POLITICAL OPPONENT, REPORTED CHIEF AWOLOWO TO THE POLICE AT REMO DIVISION, BUT WAS REBUFFED BY THE POLICE. CHIEF ONABANJO DID NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT A SUBSIDY MIGHT BE GIVEN BY THE GOVERNMENT, IN AN UNDERCOVER MANNER, TO CHIEF AWOLOWO FOR FUNDING HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HE SAID ALSO THAT ALL MEMBERS OF CHIEF AWOLOWO'S GROUP WILL PAY A FLAT RATE OF 200 NAIRA TO THE CAMPAIGN.

5. COMMENT:

DESPITE ITS IMPROBABILITY, WE ARE RELUCTANT TO DISMISS OUT OF HAND ONABANJO'S STATEMENT THAT CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE SMC, MOST IMPORTANTLY OBASANJO, ARE SYMPATHETIC TO AWOLOWO'S CAMP. UNTIL NOW, THE SMC HAS DONE A REMARKABLE JOB OF MAINTAINING THE APPEARANCE OF UNITY IN THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE PROGRAM AND NEUTRALITY TOWARD THE VARIOUS POLITICAL ASPIRANTS. HOWEVER, AS WE MOVE FURTHER ALONG THE ROAD TOWARD THE

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SECOND REPUBLIC, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT FISSURES WILL APPEAR IN THE FACADE OF SMC UNITY. IF SUCH DIVISIONS DO OCCUR, IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE WOULD BE ENORMOUS. WITHIN THAT CONTEXT, AN OBASANJO AFFINITY FOR CHIEF AWOLOWO IS NOT TOTALLY IMPROBABLE. ASIDE FROM THE TRIBAL IDENTITY, OBASANJO MAY SHARE THE VIEW, WHICH WE HAVE HEARD VOICED BY EVEN THE CHIEF'S BITTEREST ENEMIES, THAT THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT AWOLOWO IS CAPABLE OF RUNNING THE COUNTRY. GIVEN OBASANJO'S DEEP CONCERN, E.G., THE JAJI SPEECH, ABOUT THE POSSIBLY UNGOVERNABLE CHAOS OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY, AWOLOWO MAY HAVE A CERTAIN APPEAL.

6. AS FOR AWOLOWO HIMSELF, OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUE (WHO HAD NOT HEARD THE ABOVE RUMORS) TOLD US THAT UK HIGH COMMISSION HAS HAD SOME DIRECT CONTACTS OF LATE WITH AWOLOWO. IN THEM, AWOLOWO IS SUPREMEY CONFIDENT, SAYS HE WILL WIN, WILL SERVE TWO TERMS AND THEN RETIRE. OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUE ADDED, ONLY HALF JOKINGLY, THAT HIS IMPRESSION FROM THE MEETINGS IS THAT AWOLOWO IS "ABSOLUTELY CERTIFIABLE" (MAD).
END COMMENT.
LEWIS

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